

HINDU FESTIVELS UNDER THE VIJAYANAGAR RUL – A CASE OF VELLORE DISTRICT A BRIEF HISTORICAL STUDY

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Religion is described as “the expression of man’s belief in and reverence for a superhuman power or powers regarded as creating and governing the universe”. So it can be said that a religion is “a particular system of belief in a god or gods and the activities that are connected with this system” phenomenologist have divided the great religions into two groups: prophetic and mystic. For example Hinduism and Buddhism are mystical; Christianity and Islam are prophetic. In the primitive stage there were many former of worship such as fetishism, tokenism, ancestor worship and the like. In all these forms besides acceptance of a supreme power, the code of ethics received much importance. There comes an enlightened mental and spiritual state which made man to love and worship God.

Hinduism is certainly the oldest of all the religions that practical today. It is also the most varied of all the great religions of the world. Dr. Karan Singh Calls Hinduism “a geographical term based upon the Sanskrit name for the river Sindhu”. In fact Hinduism calls itself Santana Dharma, the eternal faith, because it is based not upon the teaching of single preceptor but on the collective wisdom and inspiration of great seers and sages from the very dawn of Indian Civilization. The Hinduism derives all its authority and inspiration from the Vedas. The scriptures pertaining to the Hinduism are classified under two heads: the Sruti and Smriti. The Sruti is revelation. It contains the actual words of rishi’s. The Smriti is tradition. To a Hindu everything that is seen is manifestation of Supreme Being. It is not possible to understand or know God, as he is something above human comprehension.

A Hindu understand God in his own way, generally in three forms – trimetric – based on three important functions of God, that is, creation, protection and Destruction. Brahman stands for creation, Vishnu for protection and Shiva for destruction. Hindus believe that God (Brahma) created the universe of his own free will. As such a man is also his creation and eternally and totally dependent on God. Hinduism consists of certain universal principals arrived at by the process of meditation. Its aims are to find out the process through which man can be reverted with God who concealed in the case of every creation. One has to follow merges to achieve ‘Mosesha’.

The History of Vellore begins from the Vijayanagaras period. Raga Vellore, the historical city, district headquarter for the North Arcot district played vital role in the political, social, economic and religious aspects. It comprised the present districts of Tiruvannamalai, Vellore and part of Kanchipuram districts.

The Vellore Fort was built by Chinna Bommi Nayaka. The Jalakandeswara temple and Virunchipuram temple were adored by them. The famous Tiruvannamalai Eswara temple and Devikapuram temple were also reached their glory through the festivals celebrated in that time. The Vijayanagar rulers were staunch Vaisnavites, but never had they made it religion of the State. They encourage all religion festivals and expended patronage to all religions.

In fact, they looked as if the temples were the store houses of treasure and rich organizations. Kings, feudatories, ordinary men and women made endowments, mostly in the form of lands, cash and kinds to perform various festivals in the temple where pujas were perform various festivals in the temple where pujas were not offered for several years. Food grains were released to the people in the villages to celebrate important festival occasions.

The Hindu rulers mostly pious on religions matters and they considered it their duty to conduct the festivals duly performed every year, in a particular month, according to the Hindu concept. In those days the people also considered their ruler as god and followed the religion which they king followed. The king represented the people before god and hence as the protector of the religious of the state, he had to guide the religions life of the people. He offered worship, to the goddess both on his own behalf and on behalf of his subjects and involved her blessings.

In India the life of Hindu and its religion are so entirely mixed up that it is difficult to separate them. The temples from ancient days are the place where every Hindu has to do his puja and worship to the divine. The worship of God in temples purifies the heart, controls the passions, and enables the devotees to remember the Lord always. In the Tamil society religion has always played on important role. Hence everything is done in the name of religion. Both in the urban and rural areas the people believe in religion and worship goods and goddesses. Religion played a very important role I the life of a man and the human behavior is largely shaped by religions faiths.

In Tamil country tree worship, animal worship was common from the Sangam Age. The worship of the hollows of trees was also a primitive form of worship. Certain groups of people worshipped the snakes in the hollows of the trees. People also worshipped gods seated under the trees. The Lord Siva used to reside under the shadow of banyan tree. For the convenience of the worship, a platform was constructed around the tree. This platform was called Ambalam. Later the system developed and certain gods were known with certain tree like Kadanbu for Nurugan, Kayambu for Thirumal, Konrai and Vilram for Siva etc., Later these Ambalams were developed into religions intuitions or temples. Thus the future temples had a humble beginning from the ambalam.

The temple was the abode of god. It was known in Tamil country as Koil or pujai or Devalayam. The temples were constructed with bricks, mud, wood and rock. The Vijayanagar rulers granted ornaments and other valuable to the temples. A separate place was allotted in the temple to place offerings to gods. Idols of gods were enchained in the temples and worshipped. Festivals were conducted in the temples on important occasions. At that time the students and entrances of the temples were cleaned and decorated. Sacred water was kept everywhere in pots. Doll lamps were lit. Streets were decorated by planting sugarcane on the road side. The Brahmin chanted Vedic mantras in the temple. The annual festivals were celebrated in these temples. During this time dances, drama, and music were performed by the artisans.

“Live not in a place where there is no temple is a common diction of the Tamils. Temple is a material record marking definite stages in the social, economic, religious and cultural activities. The temples are still important institutions that make man’s life meaningful and purposeful. Religion and temples were inseparably connected with the life of the Tamils. Much human activity was concentrated around the temples. The temple stands as a living representation of the cultural and spiritual life of the societies. Hence, their role cannot be belittled in the history of South India in general and Tamil Nadu in particular.

The temples were the largest consumer of goods like rice, pulses, pepper, ghee, oil, salt, cardamom, turmeric, sandal paste, betel leaves and most of the ingredients were supplied by crops cultivated on temple lands for conducting the festivals. Salvatore gives a list of festivals of the period. They were the daily worship, the sixty four festivals of rejoicing, the worship of flowers, the daily procession, the fortnightly festivals, the festivals of purification, the festivals of invoking gods, the festival of worship with lot-us, the ‘unjai’ festival, the festival of illumination, the festival of Chittirai and the festival of marriage to god and goodness.

Throughout the year many festivals were celebrated by the people. Celebrating festivals is an important feature of the religious life. Different kinds of festivals were celebrated as it is evident from the inscriptions. In fact, these festivals attracted the attention of the foreign travelers. However, the following festivals were celebrated. They are Thaitiwnal, Periyatiunal, Thingalthivasam, Vaikasitirunal, Theppanthiunal, Mahapooja, Chitiraikarthikai, Chitiraithiunal, Sivarathiri, Maganavani, Saganthi, Pangunithiram, etc.,

For the study of society and social life of the people under Vijayanagar’s rule there is a work on ‘Social and Political life under Vijayanagar’ (1346-1646) by Saltore (1934) followed by T.V. Mahalingam’s work, ‘Administration and social life under Vijayanagar’ (1940) throw much light on the religious practices followed by the people during Vijayanagar rule. Similarly Naboro Karashima in his work on ‘Towards a New formation South Indian Society under Vijayanagar rule (1992) is a micro study on macro level about the Vijayanagar rule in South Indian Society. His analysis of revenue terms and landholdings gives a new look to the period of the study.

The extension of the Vijayanagar Empire into the Tamil country began with the Southern invasions made by Sangama kings between 1356 and 1378. With the decline of Madurai Sultanate in 1377, most of the present-day Tamil Nadu, eventually, came under the rule of the Vijayanagar Empire. The rule of Vijayanagar kings was characterized by the restoration of religious to the Hindu majority and revival of music, art, festivals and crafts. The Vijayanagar Empires hold over the Tamil country collapsed in the mid 16th century as the kingdom itself disintegrated into a number of petty chieftainships.

Temple represents Tamil culture in all facets. pujas and festivals are their cultural values. All the pujas and festivals have been their own reasons and responses. Lighting lamps formed basis of worship. The temple in spite of so many trials and tribulations still exercises a great influence on the cultural and spiritual life of the societies. It stands as a living representative of the cultural heritage of the Tamils and symbolizes what is best in the fields of civilization. It is the study for the present generation to preserve these great treasures for posterity.

For the maintenance of the Nandavilakku (everlasting lamp) the shepherds or mermaids were allotted with the duty of providing ghee for lamps in the temples. For such assignment the community was provided with grants of land. Several mandradis paid in return Nal-erudu, Nalpasu, pasu, Nal-Kida as taxes to the temples in addition, to milk curd and ghee to the temple authorities during the time of festivals.

Many festivals were conducted with the help of greats from both the princess and people. Mahaneswari celebration was the most significant festival. It gained great political and social significance. An inscription at Padaivedu dated 1562 A.D remarks that, four persons were crowned as tiruvilakkakudi by Chinna Boomi nayaka, by which they had to offer four sheeps for Mahanavani festival. The inscription of Tirnkalukundram mentions about a gift of 32 cows and one bull to a manradi for the maintenance of perpetual lamp in the temple and the pandam (light) lifted by the washerman while the deity was taken for procession. A veppur inscription of 1431 A.D. mentions that the chittirai festival was celebrated as Chittiraitional in which men and women of all ages took holy bath and held feasts.

The avur inscription near Tiruvannamalai recorded during the time of Kumara Kampana refers to this festival at Chittitaikkarkartigai. In the same month the Chittrapaurmani was celebrated. On the night of Chittrapournami seven pallakkas decorated with Lilly and colour flowers were came from the different parts of town of Vellore and finally all the pallakkus were

gathered in the Fort ground. Thousands of people used to attend and enjoy the village cultural programs like Karakatham, Kokelakattai, music party and domes by the Devaradiyars.

During the Vijayanagar rule before celebrating Jathiral festival, the Village people went away to lake area worshipped Goddess Mari with the sacrifice of sheep Kida contributed by the mendacious. For the cooking of rice pots were supplied by the potters free of cost. The potters were known as Kuyavas. They were generally attached to the Village. The mandarins supplied nalla erumai (good buffalo) and nal kida (good sheep) on five of cost. Instead the mandarins and the potters were received merai, mirasi, and Saivamanya lands. Which were exempted from tax? During the eight day, people offered Raja Kuzh in a big drum which was distributed to the people. In the Night they offered a pongal with dry fish, drumstick leaves. At midnight nalla- erumai (good Buffalo) and nalla-kida (good sheep) were sacrificed. The intestines, liver and kidney of the sacrificial sheep were carried between the teeth by the Talari.

The next reaming the idol and Karagam were carried into a procession and dipped in the water. At Gudiyatham Gangai Amman festival is being celebrated with great interest. During the month of Ani Uthina Thavisaram the deities were taken into a procession.

In the month of Adi the festival called Theppathitirnal was celebrated for seven days.

This is at present called Adikriathigai. It was very popular in North Arcot District.

All these festivals in fact engaged the people of this region more in the religion activities. The rituals, ceremonies and factions associated with these festivals involved many skilled persons in different professions to contribute much towards such activities. As a result, social and economic activity of this region was quite brisk leading to cultural development.

The present thesis consists of four chapters including Introduction. In the first chapter introduction. The primitive stage of worship of human being, Hindu philosophy, and the brief sketch of Vellore district, the value of temples and the importance of religion has been gleaned in a detail manner.

The second chapter contains the special features of North Arcot district. During the British rule many administration changes were made in North Arcot district. The location and foundries, population, total area and Geographical features and historical importance are thoroughly discussed in the chapter.

The Third Chapter focuses the common festivals celebrated by people of North Arcot district during the Vijayanagar period. In almost all the months, number of festivals was conducted with the financial help of the Vijayanagar rules and the people.

The Fourth Chapter consists of Saiva and Vishnava festivals conducted by the people under the Vijayanagar rule. The festivals like Sivarathari, Tiruvadiri, Depavali, Ramanswani, Vaikasi, Ekadesi and Chittri festivals were celebrated in a great manner. The people and the Vijayanagar rulers and the Chieftains liberally donated to the temples and to conduct almost all the festivals.

In the conclusions summarizes the origin of South Indian temples. It also sums up the benefactors, benefactions and beneficiaries of North Arcot district. During the festivals, deities were taken in procession. Monthly and Annual festivals with dances, drama and music were performed by the artisans. Similarly an overall assessment of Hindu festivals in North Arcot under Vijayanagar rule has been brought out in detail.

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